The Younger Set

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS,

Author of "The Fighting Chance," Etc.

The younger set was arriving. He recognized several youthful people friends of Eileen Erroll, and, taking his bearings among these bright, fresh faces, amid this animated throng, constantly increased by the arrival of others, he started to find the hostess, now lost to sight in the breezy circle of silk and lace setting in from the stairs.

He heard names announced which meant nothing to him, which stirred no memory, names which sounded vaguely familiar, names which caused him to turn quickly, but seldom were the faces as familiar as the names.

He said to a girl behind whose chair he was standing: "All the younger brothers and sisters are coming here to confound me. I hear a Miss Innis announced, but it turns out to be her younger sister"—

"By the way, do you know my name?" she asked.

"No," he said frankly. "Do you know mine?"

"Of course I do. I listened breathlessly when somebody presented you wholesale at your sister's the other day. I'm Rosamund Fane. You might as well be instructed because you're to take me in at the Orchils' next Thursday night, I believe."

Looking up at a chinless young man who had halted near her, she said, "George, this is Captain Selwyn." Glancing at Selwyn: "Have you met my husband? Oh, of course!"

They exchanged a commonplace or two; then other people separated them without resistance on their part. And Selwyn found himself drifting, mildly interested in the rapid exchange of civilities which cost nobody a mental effort.

His sister, he had once thought, was certainly the most delightfully youthful matron in New York. But now he made an exception of Mrs. Fane. Rosamund Fane was much younger—must have been younger, for she still had something of that volatile freshness, that vague atmosphere of immaturity clinging to her like a perfume almost too delicate to detect, and under that the most profound capacity for mischief he had ever known of. Sauntering amiably amid the glittering groups continually forming and disintegrating under the clustered lights, he finally succeeded in reaching his hostess.

And Mrs. T. West Minster disengaged herself from the throng with intention as he approached.

No. And he was so sorry, and it was very amiable of his hostess to want him, but he was not remaining for the dance.

So much for the hostess, who stood there massive and gem laden, her kindly and painted features tinted now with genuine emotion.

"Can you forgive a very much mortified old lady who is really and truly fond of you?" she said.

He laughed, holding her fat, ringed hands in both of his with all the attractive deference that explained his popularity. Rising excitement had sent the color into his face and cleared his pleasant gray eyes, and he looked very young and handsome, his broad shoulders bent a trifle before the enameled and bejeweled matron.

"The boy is thoroughbred," she reflected.

"Forgive you?" he repeated, with a laugh of protest. "On the contrary, I thank you. Mrs. Ruthven is one of the most charming women I know, if that is what you mean."

Looking after him as he made his way toward the cloakroom, "The boy is thoroughbred," she reflected cynically, "and the only amusement anybody can get out of it will be at my expense! Rosamund is a perfect cat!"

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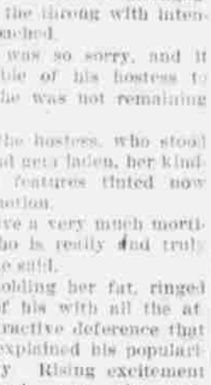
He had sent for his cab, which, no doubt, was in line somewhere, wedged among the ranks of carriages stretching east and west along the snowy street, and he stood on the thick crimson carpet under the awning while it was being summoned. The Cornelius Suydams, emerging from the house, offered Selwyn tonneau room, but he smilingly declined, having a mind for solitude and the Lenox club. A phalanx of debutantes, opera bound, also left. Then the tide set heavily the other way, and there seemed no end to the line of arriving vehicles and guests until he heard a name pronounced. A policeman warned back an approaching motor, and Selwyn saw Mrs. Ruthven, enveloped in white furs, step from the portal.



Selwyn saw Mrs. Ruthven enveloped in furs.

She saw him as he moved back, nodded, passed directly to her brougham and set foot on the step. Pausing here, she looked about her right and left, then over her shoulder straight back at Selwyn, and as she stood in silence, evidently awaiting him, it became impossible for him any longer to misunderstand without a public affront to her.

When he started toward her she spoke to her maid, and the latter moved aside, with a word to the groom in waiting.

"My maid will dismiss your carriage," she said pleasantly when he halted beside her. "There is one thing more which I must say to you."

Was this what he had expected hazard might bring to him? Was this the prophecy of his hammering pulses?

"Please hurry before people come out," she added and entered the brougham.

"I can't do this," he muttered.

"I've sent away my maid," she said. "Nobody has noticed. Those are servants out there. Will you please come before anybody arriving or departing does notice?"

And as he did not move, "Are you going to make me conspicuous by this humiliation before servants?"

He said something between his set teeth and entered the brougham.

"Do you know what you've done?" he demanded harshly.

"Yes; nothing yet. But you would have done enough to stir this borough if you had delayed another second."

"Your maid saw"—

"My maid is my maid."

He leaned back in his corner, gray eyes narrowing.

"Naturally," he said, "you are the one to be considered, not the man in the case."

"Thank you. Are you the man in the case?"

"There is no case," he said coolly.

"Then why worry about me?"

He folded his arms, sullenly at bay, yet had no premonition of what to expect from her.

"You were very brutal to me," she said at length.

"I know it, and I did not intend to be. The words came."

"You had me at your mercy and showed me little—a very little at first, afterward none."

"The words came," he repeated. "I'm sick with self contempt, I tell you."

She set her white gloved elbow on the window sill and rested her chin in her palm.

"That money," she said, with an effort. "You set some aside for me."

"Half," he nodded calmly.

"Why?"

He was silent.

"Why? I did not ask for it. There was nothing in the legal proceedings to lead you to believe that I desired it, was there?"

"No."

"Well, then"—her breath came unsteadily—"what was there in me to make you think I would accept it?"

He did not reply.

"Answer me. This is the time to answer me."

"The answer is simple enough," he said in a low voice. "Together we had made a failure of partnership. When that partnership was dissolved there remained the joint capital to be divided. And I divided it. Why not?"

"That capital was yours in the beginning, not mine. What I had of my own you never controlled, and I took it with me when I went."

"It was very little," he said.

"What of that? Did that concern you? Did you think I would have accepted anything from you? A thousand times I have been on the point of notifying you through attorney that the deposit now standing in my name is at your disposal."

"Why didn't you notify me then?" he asked, reddening to the temples.

"Because I did not wish to hurt you by doing it that way. And I had not the courage to say it kindly over my own signature. That is why, Captain Selwyn."

And as he remained silent: "That is what I had to say; not all, because I wish to—to thank you for offering it. You did not have very much either, and you divided what you had. So I thank you, and I return it." The tension forced her to attempt a laugh. "So we stand once more on equal terms unless you have anything of mine to return."

"I have your photograph," he said.

The silence lasted until he straightened up and, rubbing the fog from the window glass, looked out.

"We are in the park," he remarked, turning toward her.

"Yes. I did not know how long it might take to explain matters. You are free of me now whenever you wish."

He picked up the telephone—hesitated. "Home?" he inquired with an effort. And at the forgotten word they looked at one another in stricken silence.

"Y-yes; to your home first if you will let me drop you there"—

"Thank you. That might be imprudent."

"No, I think not. You say you are living with the Gerards?"

"Yes, temporarily, but I've already taken another place."

"Where?"

"Oh, it's only a bachelor's kennel, a couple of rooms"—

"Where, please?"

"Near Lexington and Sixty-sixth. I could go there. It's only partly furnished yet"—

"Then tell Hudson to drive there."

"Thank you, but it is not necessary"—

"Please let me. Tell Hudson or I will."

"You are very kind," he said and gave the order.

"May I ask me a question?" she said.

"Ask it, child."

"Then are you happy?"

He did not answer.

"Because I desire it, Philip. I want you to be. You will be, won't you? I did not dream that I was ruining your army career when I—went mad"—

"How did it happen, Alixe?" he asked, with a cold curiosity that chilled her. "How did it come about, wretched as we seemed to be together, unhappy, incapable of understanding each other?"

"Phil! There were days"—

He raised his eyes.

"You speak only of the unhappy ones," she said. "But there were moments"—

"Yes, I know it, and so I ask you why?"

"Phil, I don't know. There was that last bitter quarrel—the night you left for Leyte after the dance. I—it all grew suddenly intolerable. You seemed so horribly unreal—everything seemed unreal in that ghastly city—you, I, our marriage of crazy impulse—the people, the sunlight, the deathly odors, the torturing, endless creak of the punkahs. It was not a question of—of love, of anger, of hate. I tell you I was stunned. I had no emotions concerning you or myself after that last scene—only a stupefied, blind necessity to get away, a groping instinct to move toward home—to make my way home and be rid forever of the dream that drugged me! And then—and then"—

"I have your photograph," he said.

"He came," said Selwyn very quietly. "Go on."

But she had nothing more to say.

"Alixe!"

She shook her head, closing her eyes.

"Little girl—oh, little girl," he said softly, the old familiar phrase finding its way to his lips and she trembled slightly—"was there no other way but that? Had marriage made the world such a living hell for you that there was no other way but that?"

"Phil, I helped to make it a hell."

"Yes—because I was pitiably inadequate to design anything better for us. I didn't know how. I didn't understand. I, the architect of our future—failed."

"It was worse than that, Phil. We"—she looked blindly at him—"we had yet to learn what love might be. We did not know. If we could have waited—only waited—perhaps—because there were moments"— She flushed crimson.

"I could not make you love me," he repeated. "I did not know how."

"Because you yourself had not learned how. But—at times—now looking back to it—I think—I think we were very near to it—at moments. And then that dreadful dream closed down on us again. And then—the end."

For a long while they sat in silence. Mrs. Ruthven's white furs now covered her face. At last the carriage stopped.

As he sprang to the curb he became aware of another vehicle standing in front of the house, a cab, from which Mrs. Ruthven's maid descended.

"What is she doing here?" he asked, turning in astonishment to Mrs. Ruthven.

"Phil," she said in a low voice, "I knew you had taken this place. Gerald told me. Forgive me, but when I saw you under the awning it came to me in a flash what to do. And I've done it. Are you sorry?"

"No. Did Gerald tell you that I had taken this place?"

"Yes. I asked him."

Selwyn looked at her gravely, and she looked him very steadily in the eyes.

"Before I go may I say one more word?" he asked gently.

"Yes, if you please. Is it about Gerald?"

"Yes. Don't let him gamble. You saw the signature on that check?"

"Yes, Phil."

"Then you understand. Don't let him do it again."

"No. And—Phil?"

"What?"

"That check is—is deposited to your credit—with the rest. I have never dreamed of using it." Her cheeks were afire again, but with shame this time.

"You will have to accept it, Alixe."

"I cannot."

"You must. Don't you see you will affront Gerald? He has repaid me. That check is not mine, nor is it his."

"I can't take it," she said, with a shudder. "What shall I do with it?"

"There are ways—hospitals, if you care to. Good night, child."

She stretched out her gloved arm to him. He took her hand very gently and retained it while he spoke.

"I wish you happiness," he said. "I ask your forgiveness."

"Give me mine, then."

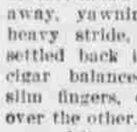
"Yes, if there is anything to forgive. Good night."

"Good night, boy," she gasped.

He turned sharply, quivering under the familiar name. Her maid, standing in the snow, moved forward, and he motioned her to enter the brougham.

"Home," he said unsteadily and stood there very still for a minute or two, even after the carriage had whirled away into the storm. Then, looking up at the house, he felt for his keys, but a sudden horror of being alone arrested him, and he stepped back, calling out to his cabman, who was already turning his horse's head: "Wait a moment. I think I'll drive back to Mrs. Gerard's. And take your time."

Chapter 6



IT was still early—lacking a quarter of an hour to midnight—when Selwyn arrived home. Nina had retired, but Austin sat in the library, obstinately plodding through the last chapters of a brand new novel.

"This is a wretched excuse for sitting up," he yawned, laying the book flat on the table, but still open. "I ought never to be trusted alone with any book." Then he removed his reading glasses, yawned again and surveyed Selwyn from head to foot.

"Very pretty," he said. "Well, how are the yellow ones, Phil? Or was it all debutante and slop twaddle?"

"Few from the cradle, but bunches were arriving for the dance as I left."

"Eileen went at half past 11."

"I didn't know she was going," said Selwyn, surprised.

"She didn't want you to. The playful kitten business, you know—frisks apropos of nothing to frisk about. But we all fancied you'd stay for the dance." He yawned mightily and gazed at Selwyn with ruddy gravity.

"Whisk?" he inquired.

"No."

"Cigar?" mildly urgent.

"No, thanks."

"Bed?"

"I think so. But don't wait for me, Austin. Is that the evening paper? Where is St. Paul?"

Selwyn unfolded the paper. So his brother-in-law moved ponderously away, yawning frightfully at every heavy stride, and the younger man settled back in his chair, a fragrant cigar balanced between his strong, slim fingers, one leg dropped loosely over the other. After awhile the newspaper fell to the floor.

He sat there without moving for a long time. His cigar, burning close, had gone out. The fire having burned low, he rose, laid a pair of heavy logs across the coals, dragged his chair to the hearth and settled down in it deeply.

Long after his cigar burned bitter he sat with eyes fixed on the blaze. When the flames at last began to flicker and subside his lids fluttered, then drooped, but he had lost all reckoning of time when he opened them again to find Miss Erroll in furs and ball gown kneeling on the hearth and laying a log across the andirons.

"Upon my word!" he murmured, confused; then, rising quickly: "Is that you, Miss Erroll? What time is it?"

"Four o'clock in the morning, Captain Selwyn," she said, straightening up to her full height. "This room is icy. Are you frozen?"

Chilled through, he stood looking about in a dazed way, incredulous of the hour and of his own slumber.

"I don't know how I happened to do it," he muttered, abashed by his plight.

"I rekindled the fire for your benefit," she said. "You had better use it before you retire." And she seated herself in the armchair, stretching out

Craig.

her ungloved hands to the blaze, smooth, innocent hands, so soft, so amazingly fresh and white.

He moved a step forward into the warmth, stood a moment, then reached forward for a chair and drew it up beside hers.

"Do you mean to say you are not sleepy?" he asked.

"I? No, not in the least. I will be tomorrow, though."

"Did you have a good time? You danced a lot, I dare say," he ventured.

"Yes—a lot," studying the floor.

"Decent partners?"

"Oh, yes."

"Who was there?"

She looked up at him. "You were not there," she said, smiling.

"No, I cut it. But I did not know you were going. You said nothing about it."

"Of course you would have stayed if you had known, Captain Selwyn?" She was still smiling.

"Of course," he replied.

"Would you really?"

"Why, yes."

There was something not perfectly familiar to him in the girl's bright brevity, in her direct personal inquiry, for between them hitherto the gayly impersonal had ruled except in moments of lightest badinage.

"Was it an amusing dinner?" she asked in her turn.

"Rather." Then he looked up at her, but she had stretched her slim, silk shod feet to the fender, and her head was bent aside, so that he could see only the curve of the cheek and the little, close set ear under its ruddy mass of gold.

"Who was there?" she asked, too, carelessly.

For a moment he did not speak. Under his bronzed cheek the flat muscles stirred. Had some meddling, malicious fool ventured to whisper an unfit jest to this young girl? Had a word or a smile and a phrase cut in two awakened her to a sorry wisdom at his expense? Something had happened, and the idea stirred him to wrath, as when a child is wantonly frightened or a dumb creature misused.

"What did you ask me?" he inquired gently.

"I asked you who was there, Captain Selwyn."

He recalled some names and laughingly mentioned his dinner partner's preference for Harmon. She listened absently, her chin nestling in her palm, only the close set, perfect ear turned toward him.

"Who led the cotillon?" he asked.

"Jack Ruthven, dancing with Rosamund Fane."

She drew her feet from the fender and crossed them, still turned away from him, and so they remained in silence until again she shifted her position almost impatiently.

"You are very tired," he said.

"No; wide awake."

"Don't you think it best for you to go to bed?"

"No, but you may go."

And as he did not stir, "I mean that you are not to sit here because I do." And she looked around at him.

"What has gone wrong, Eileen?" he said quietly.

He had never before used her given name, and she flushed up.

"There is nothing the matter, Captain Selwyn. Why do you ask?"

"Yes, there is," he said.

"There is not, I tell you"—

"And if it is something you cannot understand," he continued pleasantly, "perhaps it might be well to ask Nina to explain it to you."

"There is nothing to explain."

"Because," he went on very gently, "one is sometimes led by malicious suggestion to draw false and unpleasant inferences from harmless facts"—

"Captain Selwyn"—

"Yes, Eileen."

But she could not go on. Speech and thought itself remained sealed; only a confused consciousness of being hurt remained—somehow to be remedied by something he might say, might deny. Yet how could it help her for him to deny what she herself refused to believe—refused through sheer instinct while ignorant of its meaning?

(To be Continued.)

Crank—What is the power of Speeder's new runabout?

Frank—Sixty.

Crank—What! That little machine sixty horse-power?

Frank—No; sixty skunk-power.—February Lippincott's.

A surgeon in a Western town, engaged to preform an operation of minor character upon a somewhat unsophisticated patient, asked him if he were willing to have only a local anaesthetic.

"Sure," replied the other; "I believe in patronizing home industry whenever you can."

And he meant it.—February Lippincott's.

"Alas," sighed Weary Wiggles, gazing dejectedly upon his torn and tattered trousers, "I'm afraid these here pants is on their last legs!"—February Lippincott's.

"Have you seen Barker lately? He's on his last legs."

"No. Are they as bowed as his first ones?"—February Lippincott's.

Southern hospitality was never more finely illustrated than when the Atlanta lady, having danced with Bill Taft, referred to him as the poetry of motion.—State Journal.

When we pass a church where the snow hasn't been cleaned off the sidewalk we have our doubts about the good pastor's orthodoxy.—State Journal.

New York City ranks high as a lover of dogs. The sales of dogs for the last year amounted to about $65,000.

Author—How is this? I don't get the usual stipend for that joke, "Pa," said Johnny, etc.

Editor—Only half price for children's jokes.—Judge.

Longwood, the house Napoleon occupied on St. Helena, was given to the French by Queen Victoria.

A sign hung in a conspicuous place in a store in Lawrence:

"Man is made of dust. Dust settles. Are you a man?"—Boston Record.

The training of a camel is no easy matter, as it takes about three years to teach it to bend the knees in order to be loaded and unloaded.

To know what are the best bargains to be had in the stores of this town to-day, as you may know by reading the ads, is knowledge worth having.

THE VERY BEST.

Have any of our readers seen a recent copy of the Cincinnati Weekly Enquirer? If not, it will pay to send for a copy, if for no other purpose than to note its present great worth as an educator in all things that tend to make life prosperous, and home, the happiest place on earth.

The editor by asking its readers to criticise and suggest improvements; and following advice thus obtained is enabled to produce a paper that exactly fits needs of a family and a material aid to father, mother and children in reaching that higher level in social life, where content and comfort reigns supreme.

Father obtains ample information that guides in the where, when and how to regulate and increase the income from his efforts. The mother in management of household affairs, practical economy, government of children, and other duties that makes her toil a labor of love. Children's minds and hearts are freed from thoughts of questionable amusements and frivolities of life, and encouraged to emulate all that is helpful in planing for a useful future in life.

The Grand Idea being that; "As are our Homes, so will be the Community, State and Nation."

A most desirable help, is a nonsectarian sermon each week, as preached by that Biblical Student Pastor Chas. T. Russell; a forcible reminder of the spiritual and temporal rewards gained by righteous living as preferable to a Godless life that brings nought but misery to the home.

Other departments and features are above the ordinary, the unanimous verdict of its readers being: "The cleanest and best family Weekly known to them.

Sample copies may be had by writing to the ENQUIRER COMPANY, Cincinnati, O.

A man's sympathy is like his bank account. It is best not to draw too heavily upon it if you wish to retain his friendship.

Eleanor Mercein Kelley's short story, "The Girl Who Forgot," in the January Lippincott's, was probably the most talked about story of the month. The February Lippincott's contains another striking tale by her—"A Friend of Jimmie's."

"So he has ceased to be her ideal?"

"He has."

"What disagreeable thing did he do?"

"Married another girl."—Louisville Courier-Journal.